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**Labor and Public Employees  
February 27, 2014  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network Testimony**

**HB 5283 (RAISED) An Act Concerning Expansion of Family and Medical Leave.**

Life changes when a person is told "You have cancer." But the patient is only one of the people affected by the cancer. Life also changes for those who care about and love the person with cancer. And life also changes for the person who will help the patient get through the cancer experience – the caregiver.

The caregiver plays a key role in the patient's care. Good, reliable caregiver support is crucial to the physical and emotional well being of people with a serious or chronic illness like cancer. Overall, there are an estimated 486,000 caregivers in CT providing 465 million hours of care, according to AARP research.

Today people spend far less time in the hospital than in the past. This means that sicker people are being cared for at home. There has also been a shift in cancer treatment, and a lot of it is now done in outpatient treatment centers. This has led to a need for the family to be part of the day-to-day care of the person with cancer. Today, families provide about 80% of home-care services. Caregivers are doing things that, until recently, were done by trained health professionals.

Caregivers have many roles. These roles change, as the patient's needs change during and after cancer treatment. Caregivers serve as home health aides and companions. They may help feed, dress, and bathe the patient. Caregivers arrange schedules, manage insurance issues, and provide transportation. They are legal assistants, financial managers, and housekeepers. They often have to take over the duties of the person with cancer, and still meet the needs of other family members. An estimated 61% of family caregivers of adults aged 50 and older are currently employed either part time or full time.

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 was designed to help employees balance their work and family responsibilities by allowing them to take reasonable unpaid leave for certain family and medical reasons. The FMLA provides certain employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year. It also requires that the employee's group health benefits be maintained during the leave.

FMLA applies to all public and private employers with 50 or more employees. These employers must provide an eligible employee with up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave each year for any of the following reasons:

- For the birth and care of the newborn child of an employee
- For placement with the employee of a child for adoption or foster care
- To care for an immediate family member (spouse, child, or parent with a serious health condition)
- When the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition

HB 5283 would expand eligibility by adding parent in-laws, siblings, grandparent or grandchild to the list of family members for whom an employee may take leave under the FMLA. Just as a cancer patient should not have to choose between their job and their healthcare, a working caregiver should not have to choose between their job and caring for a loved one who needs them.

We urge a favorable report from this committee on HB 5283.

*The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society, supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN works to encourage elected officials and candidates to make cancer a top national priority. ACS CAN gives ordinary people extraordinary power to fight cancer with the training and tools they need to make their voices heard.*

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